



# Fire Funding Impacts

## Oregon

### Deschutes National Forest

#### FOREST OVERVIEW

Nestled along the Cascade Mountains, the Deschutes National Forest is one of the most popular recreation forests in the Pacific Northwest. The forest manages 1.6 million acres of national forest land in Central Oregon adjacent to the communities of Bend, Sisters, Sunriver, La Pine, and Crescent. In 2014, the local tourism bureau, Visit Bend, calculated there were 8.6 million visitor days to the area, with 75 percent of those visitor days spent doing outdoor recreation, primarily on the Deschutes National Forest. Visitors come to see Oregon's scenic icons like the Three Sisters and Mt. Jefferson Wildernesses, Newberry National Volcanic Monument, the Cascade Lakes Scenic Byway, and the Deschutes and Metolius Rivers.

Redirected funds will restrict the ability to accomplish mission critical programs, such as the following.

#### RECREATION, ROADS, AND TRAILS MAINTENANCE

Declining budgets and increased recreation use have been limiting the Deschutes National Forest's ability to maintain recreation opportunities, facilities, and roads that local business owners, visitors, and community members depend upon.

In the past 3 years, both the road and recreation maintenance budgets on the forest were reduced by 50 percent and the recreation budget remained flat. These reductions combined with a 25-35 percent increase in recreation use during the same period have made it difficult to support and maintain recreation opportunities, facilities, and roads. In 2015, the forest received funding to maintain only 1.5 percent of the trails and 2 percent of the roads on the national forest.

With current funding levels, the roads program can only maintain the Federal Highway Safety Roads to minimum standards and cannot do maintenance on the lower level roads that access most recreation areas. This year, as the very popular Newberry National Volcanic Monument celebrates its 25th anniversary, the road to one of its premier sites, Paulina Peak, can barely be maintained to minimum standards. Providing safe road access to recreation sites is not sustainable in the near future with continuing declines in road maintenance budgets.

The forest relies heavily on volunteers to help with trail maintenance. They contribute over \$1 million of labor and nearly 900 volunteers perform 70-80 percent of the trail maintenance. Safety and training of the trail volunteers is done by a shrinking forest recreation staff. Additional budget reductions may affect the Forest's ability to safely manage and effectively utilize volunteers.



*Volunteers perform 70-80 percent of trail maintenance on the Deschutes National Forest.*

(over)



## PARTNERSHIPS

Another impact of budget reductions is the Deschutes National Forest's inability to support local partners. The forest has an extremely strong partnership program bringing in \$6.7 million in cash contributions and \$4.5 million in noncash contributions from partners in 2014. Many projects within the recreation program are funded through partnership dollars. Most recently, the local Nordic club raised \$35,000 to help replace an aging snow shelter near Bend, Oregon; however, with limited recreation staff available to complete the necessary planning, there have been delays in the shelter's replacement. In addition, several failing boat ramps on the Deschutes River and on Sparks Lake could be replaced through State Marine grants; however, the forest lacks the matching funds to compete for these grants.

## WILDLAND-URBAN INTERFACE

Over 50 percent of the Deschutes National Forest is adjacent to communities and subdivisions in the wildland-urban interface (WUI). With declines in the vegetation management budget, the forest is challenged to adequately treat fuels in these WUI areas. Decreases in funding impact the pace of treatments needed to get ahead of the problem on the forest and affect the ability to protect the communities of Sisters, Bend, Sunriver, La Pine, and Crescent.

## SPECIAL USE PERMITS

Reductions in funding for special use permit administration impact our local communities and businesses by reducing our ability to respond to permits for utilities, communication sites, outfitter and guide businesses, and special community recreation events like the Cascade Cycling Classic, the Dirty Half Marathon, the Cascades Swimming Classic, and Pole, Pedal, Paddle. These recreation events bring millions of dollars into our local communities and businesses.



*Prescribed burn area on the Deschutes National Forest. (iStock.com)*